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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the perceptions of student teachers, cooperating teachers and pupils in two social studies lessons. Videotapes of two student teachers in action in the classroom were used for stimulated recall interviews in which they discussed their perceptions and feelings about their own performance, their cooperating teacher's reactions, and the students' responses. It is posited that the classroom in which any student teacher is placed provides a social system that has already been shaped by the cooperating teacher and the students. It appeared that the social system of the classroom was an important factor in the thinking of the two student teachers, and their perceptions of their relationship to the cooperating teacher were closely tied to their perceptions of their relationship with the students. (JD)

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The Social System in Social Studies Lessons: Little Girl Lost vs. Work in the Real World

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Introduction

In the Fall of 1986, a study was begun at Syracuse University to investigate the perceptions of classroom lessons taught by graduate and undergraduate student teachers in each of three subject areas (social studies, English, and science). My role in this research project was to examine the two lessons taught by the student teachers in social studies. To this task I brought fourteen years of experience as a public school secondary social studies teacher. I was acquainted with the subjects of the study since I had served as a graduate assistant in the generic methods course (Strategies of Teaching) in which all six subjects were enrolled immediately prior to their student teaching experience.

The purpose of this paper, as a part of the symposium dealing with the larger study noted above, is to discuss the perceptions of classroom participants (student teachers, cooperating teachers and pupils) in two social studies lessons.

Subjects

The subjects of this particular segment of our study were a "matched pair" of student teachers. This pair consisted of an undergraduate senior and a masters level graduate

student. Both were social studies majors and had, based upon self-reports, approximately equal prior experience working with children. The pair had worked as partners in peer teaching exercises in an eight-week secondary strategies course immediately prior to their student teaching. Alice Carroll was a twenty-one year old undergraduate. Tim Marlow was a twenty-seven year old graduate student. Both were white. (Real names have not been used in this paper.)

The pair did their student teaching in the same high school in a large suburban school district. The pupils of the school reflect the predominantly middle-class, white population found in the district.

Data Collection

Near the end of their student teaching experience, each student teacher was videotaped teaching a lesson. The student teachers selected the lesson and class to be videotaped. At the end of the school day, the videotape was played back for the student teacher and a stimulated recall interview (SRI) was conducted. Each student teacher had previous experience with SRI procedures. The student teacher was asked to stop the tape whenever he/she was aware of making a decision or noticing something about the pupils. The student teacher's responses to the videotape were

recorded on audiotape. On the day following the lesson, the videotape was played back and interviews were conducted separately with the cooperating teacher and two pupils, selected by the cooperating teachers, who had participated in the lesson. As the videotape was played, the interviewer stopped the videotape at each point previously identified by the student teacher, and asked what the participant was noticing at that point. All SRI's were audiotaped. All procedures were as similar as possible for both subjects. Transcripts of the interviews were made from the audiotape recordings. These transcripts and the videotaped lessons were then analyzed using qualitative methods. After several readings and viewings of the entire body of data, themes emerged which were then checked and rechecked for verification in the data.

This study is limited by having only one lesson for each student teacher. My observations have been once-removed and limited to the transcripts and view of the camera. I have also chosen to narrow my focus to deal primarily with the perceptions of the student teachers.

Overview of the lessons

It would be helpful for the reader to have a sense of what the lessons involved. Here are brief sketches of the lessons.

Alice Carroll is student teaching with Mrs. Anne Marotta. The class chosen for videotaping is, according to the cooperating teacher, "A Regents (upper level in New York State) class, but not the highest achievers. There is a range from the fifth grade reading level to college reading level." It is a tenth grade European Studies class. Alice is continuing a unit on The Hundred Years War between France and England, employing an analogy that compares the War to a football game. The analogy was suggested to her by Mrs. Marotta. The lesson focuses on the "fourth quarter" of the war as Alice notes the role of Joan of Arc and the evolution of absolute monarchy in France.

As the taping begins, we can note the "typical" classroom seen in so many American suburban schools. The one-piece, yellowish pupils' desks are neatly arranged in six rows of five seats each. The front of the room is dominated by the "green" board, the pulled-down screen and the front-and-center overhead projector. Bright sunlight, necessitating drawn shades, falls in lines on the brown and white tiled floor. The white walls seem bright against the somewhat sterile image of the pushed-back lectern and the near empty map rack hanging above the "green" board. Bookcases and file cabinets occupy the back wall area of the room. The cooperating teacher is sitting in the back of the room next to the camera.

As the pupils file in, Alice is busied adjusting to new demands and activities. In the interview, she says:

> I had forgotten that Nancy had asked me if she could do a survey...I all of a sudden decided to let her do it while I'm doing homework check, to save time.

Mrs. Marotta views this period of activity as "confusion". One pupil reportedly thought, "She was trying to get herself in order."

Alice proceeds to check pupils' homework by going up and down the aisles, stopping to examine each pupil's paper and record appropriate notations in her gradebook. At the same time, the pupils are being given a survey by a class member, Nancy. In the interview, Alice notes, "I guess it makes (Nancy) a little shy to be up in front."

Checking the homework appears to be problematic for Alice. It does not appear easy to adopt some else's technique. Mrs. Marotta comments:

> I suggested to her -- I check on it this way about once a week -- but it seems like sometimes she does it almost everyday, and it takes too much time out of class.

One of the pupils interviewed perceives the process to be "boring".

After the homework is checked, Alice reviews it asking the pupils if they are having trouble with any terms. The homework assignment is to locate definitions for a list of

terms. Pupils mention terms that were difficult. Alice asks for other pupils to read their definitions, to which she sometimes adds information. Several terms are reviewed before moving on to the next activity. One pupil who was interviewed felt that "this was an important part, because if you don't understand, like, a definition or a question, she'll answer it." The cooperating teacher, during the interview, remarked :

> I was sitting right next to Stacey and I could not hear her....I knew 90% of the rest of the class could not have heard her. You certainly could encourage Stacey. Just say, 'Get quiet', 'pay attention', and 'Stacey, would you please say that again so that everyone hears it.'...But now everyone's missing it.

Two female pupils volunteer to help Alice pass out the homework papers for the next day. This is accompanied by an explanation by Alice of how to do the homework and how it relates to the test that will be given the next week.

Alice then proceeds to continue the unfinished analogy of the last "quarter" of The Hundred Years War. She uses the overhead projector. The pupils take notes and ask questions. Alice gives information. This segment of the lesson results in some revealing thoughts from the participants. Alice's comments reflect an uneasy anticipation of Mrs. Marotta's reaction to her handling of the content. "I really stumbled over this part. And I'm waiting to hear what Anne has to say about this" In fact, Mrs. Marotta's opinion is critical:

> Alice has got to do more research and get herself a couple of really good textbooks, because some of the research she's been doing she says she does it from encyclopedias.

Alice's use of notes also is of concern to the pupils. Lisa remarks, "Oh no -- not notes again, we get so many notes in that class...and you can't learn that much when you keep writing..."

Mrs. Marotta is concerned by "the way" Alice introduces the activity.

> She says 'Now we are going to go to our notes.' It's just the way she says it. You can tell she wasn't excited about it...you have to be a little bit enthusiastic.

Alice reveals:

> I haven't allowed myself time this semester to really work on lesson plans, so sometimes it just comes out as notes, and I don't really know how to do some things, other than notes.

As the notetaking proceeds, Alice continues to provide information and to react to pupils' questions. This appears to frustrate her:

> Right here. They were really getting ahead of me and it made things very hard because I knew that what I had in the notes was not in the same order that they were asking, and it was going to come right out of order and, I'm just like, If you'd only let me go with how I'm going to go, then I'd answer all the questions, but I was trying to get them to like, 'Let me finish', but they wouldn't let me, so I ended up having to go with it, and it ended up being repetitive, and I didn't want it that way.

Is this a student teacher who feels out of control -- even lost? This exasperation is not lost on the pupils. Lisa

notes, "She can't seem to control the whole class at once." In the interview, her cooperating teacher also notes Alice's failure to "connect" the specifics of the class notes to other knowledge:

> Many of these (notes on the overhead) are before she's covered the material and so they don't have a lot of roots to them, they're just floating out there -- limited monarchy -- it would be nice if they did have some syntax -- what does limited mean? What is monarchy?

The class ends without the analogy being completed. Mrs. Marotta judges Alice's lesson to have been mediocre with its weakest point being that "She doesn't see how all the material relates together."

Tim Marlow's class is a tenth-grade European Studies class which his cooperating teacher, Mr. Fred Seeley, describes as "your average suburban class". Pupils "run the gamut" from those who are "very, very good", through those "reading two or three grade levels below where they should be", and those with "really strange personal problems", to "at least one kid who goes to resource".

Basically, the classroom is similar to the room in which Alice is teaching. There are a few notable differences: the pupils' desks are blue, the front of the room is dominated by a large table covered with file-boxes, the overhead sits on a student desk in the center of the front row, and the

sunlight is not as bright as it falls on the green tiled floor. Mr. Seeley is not in the room during the lesson.

Tim begins the class by giving directions for working in pairs to list things on which parents and teenagers might disagree. He explains that this relates to the previous day's class and that he will be using an analogy comparing the relationship between the Church and those who supported the scientific method of inquiry during the Renaissance to the relationship between parents and teenagers today. In the interview, Tim points out that this strategy is "something a little different to get the pupils geared up and excited about doing something different." Mr. Seeley, during the interview, comments on the new strategy Tim is using.

> Tim is taking a risk in the sense that he has the class under control and then he's gonna allow them to split up into groups...and then he has to bring them back to attention...so it is a risk and it doesn't always work out, yet he has enough confidence to try...I was very pleased that he took the chance.

After the directions have been given, the pupils move their desks and work in pairs. One interviewed pupil noted:

> I didn't like the seating -- the partners -- I didn't even know the kid I was sitting next to and I wanted to go with my friend Annie. He told me I couldn't.

Tim circulates, talking with individuals and, at one point, stopping by the overhead to note attendance as students continue to work.

Having had five or so minutes to work, the pupils then report items from their list. Tim records these on the overhead projector. Later he asks the pupils to categorize the items on the list generated by the class. Mr. Seeley notes, "Tim does do a good job trying to get lots of involvement."

Pupils continue to work in pairs while Tim categorizes the list on the overhead at the front of the room. When his task is finished, he circulates to check with each pair of pupils. Tim is trying to use a suggestion from his university supervisor to use "positive reinforcement with his students." As he circulates, he works on this technique. One of the pupils who was interviewed, Julie, noted:

> Mr. Marlow was going around and checking everybody's stuff. If they had something that wasn't right, he'd tell them instead of making them get something wrong. He was helping people. If they didn't understand the questions, he went over to them, and treated them well.

Mr. Seeley viewed this activity in a slightly different manner:

> What I see is that Tim, as usual, is doing an excellent job of keeping kids on task. They aren't being threatened and he walks around making sure that each kid is doing exactly what he's supposed to be doing.

Each pair of pupils then share one of their categories with the class. Following this, Tim explains his groupings.

Tim discusses the analogy, comparing Church and scientists to parents and teenagers. He also discusses how the analogy "works" and "does not work". Tim cautions the pupils not to go home and "challenge their parents". In the interview, Julie noted:

> He told us that we shouldn't go home and tell our parents that they're wrong about everything and don't tell them that I told you all this, and that it was just an exercise to see how much everybody says it is the same. It was just an exercise.

Still, Tim showed concern during the interview, "I'll probably get some phone calls tonight...I'm trying to protect myself here."

Mr. Seeley, on the other hand, interprets the events positively, also noting Tim's background knowledge of the community:

> He's terribly aware of the fact that there's a little problem with the 40% divorce rate. 40% of our students come in from homes where there's a divorce which means there are some kids who are probably in the process so he's trying to rectify any problems that might occur, which I think is good.

After thoroughly discussing the analogy, Tim directs the class into a reading skill exercise using a section of their textbook. During this activity, Tim sees a need to prepare for future learning. He defines and discusses the meaning of "value". During the interview, he says:

> I want to give them at least a way to work with the word, because I know I'm going to use it a couple of times, and I want them to know what I'm talking about.

As the pupils work quietly, again seated in rows, Tim circulates among them.

Social Systems in Classrooms

Few teachers would question the idea that social systems operate in their classrooms. Weber (1978) explains that a social system or relationship exists when several people adjust their behavior to one another. This adjustment of behavior is based on the meaning given to it by the participants. It also determines the form which the interactive behavior takes. To distinguish behavior in a social system from behavior in general, Weber notes that standing is behavior, while standing in line is social behavior. Social behavior reflects an association to other people.

All the participants who were interviewed in this study showed an awareness of social systems operating within and around the classroom, but references to social systems were most prevalent in the comments of the two student teachers.

What were the social systems perceived by Alice and Tim? If a social system is viewed to consist of two or more individuals interacting directly or indirectly in a bounded situation (Mitchell, 1979), then we see that both Alice and Tim perceive themselves as operating in a complex set of social systems. Alice has to deal with the pupils, the

cooperating teacher, and her social studies methods professor. The experience can be over-whelming. She says:

> ...sometimes I can't figure out what Mrs. Marotta wants, and I'm trying to -- well, she wants this, Dr. Kuhn wants this, I want this, and I just feel lost, I just give in. And I just lecture...I just want student teaching to end!

Tim also notes the complex nature of student teaching:

> (I wanted) to satisfy everybody...One I had some definite, what my master teacher and I are calling drudgery work...which was they had to do some reading and writing about what they read...where they have to read headings and the questions in the textbooks and then answer the questions...a little mapping exercise...that will help them to do some of their homework tonight. So that was my information segment of the lesson...I wanted to work with some analogy, and I wanted them to be aware and reflective of the fact that they were using analogy; and also, to test it out and let them work with the analogy of children and parents vs. scientists and the Catholic Church...and at the end I was also trying to mention the limitations of analogy so that they wouldn't go home and challenge their parents as the scientists challenged the Church in the Renaissance.

In listing these various instructional activities, Tim also has implicitly noted several "others" whom he is trying to satisfy. The cooperating teacher, the school district (the required "drudgery" work), his social studies methods professor (the mapping exercise), his strategies professor (analogy), the students (homework), and the parents (he doesn't want to challenge them). Together with Alice, Tim points out the multi-level social system in which student teachers find themselves.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this social system is how the student teachers view themselves in relation to their cooperating teachers. During the interview, Alice makes the following comments which reveal her view of Mrs. Marotta:

> I decided to do what my cooperating teacher does, by going and checking person by person for the homework...This is the system that she has. I think she went around much quicker (checking homework).
>
> Anne had given the basics and talked and discussed. And like, just put so much other information in there that there was very little on the overhead.
>
> She has stories beyond belief. She is just very vivacious in there and is just...sometimes very vivid in what she tells; and funny stories, things that would get them interested.

Alice seems oppressed by the weight of Mrs. Marotta's critical reaction to her. During the interview Alice mentions that she feels threatened by her cooperating teacher. Alice says she cannot measure up to Mrs. Marotta. Worse yet seems to be the fear of ridicule and embarrassment she has felt when Mrs. Marotta corrects her in front of the class. Because of her fear she tries to "cover her tracks". Alice doesn't feel that her cooperating teacher has any idea of her inner anguish:

> I mean she knows that I'm going overboard but I don't think she realizes how I'm torn inside, too. So I don't know quite what I'm doing and I don't quite know what is expected of me...I want to be like her (Mrs. Marotta).

The sense of disapproval is reaffirmed in the responses of the cooperating teacher:

> Well, right there, it was wrong what she said...
>
> This could be a really exciting story...And, it's kind of disappointing that they really didn't get into it.
>
> There, after Tammy's question, I would have loved to have seen Alice say, 'Yes, he was a weak ruler'...I think that would have been a nice lead-in there.
>
> I'm not too sure they know what she's doing.
>
> She just missed the whole point on the Estates General and the permanent land tax.

In the "looking glass", Alice seems to see a struggling, lost girl.

On the other hand, Tim seems to judge himself as reasonably competent and improving. "I'm better than I was at the beginning." He tries to assimilate things that he values from Mr. Seeley, but not everything.

> I don't even know really what my style of teaching is yet, but...I'm kinda trying to meld SU and my master teacher together...
>
> That's one of Mr. Seeley's strategies and I'm not 100% sure whether I'm going to plan to do it or not myself.
>
> ...Mr. Seeley says I'm too easy (on the pupils)...but I try not to say anything unless it really bothers me.

Throughout the interview, Tim makes comments which seem to reflect his determination to form his own style. In doing so, he values his cooperating teacher's suggestions, but does not accept them unquestioningly. He is focused on preparing for life in the "real world":

> ...maybe (student teaching is) just learning about what it's really like out there...I'm not sure what's going

> to happen once I get in the real world, as far as teaching goes.

Mr. Seeley's appraisal of Tim appears quite positive and supports Tim's interpretation. During the interview, Mr. Seeley said:

> I feel real pleased with what he's doing. I'm very, very happy...he's doing more that one activity in a class period and...he's making very efficient use of time...I have faith in Tim.

A second important aspect of the social system is how the student teachers view themsleves in relation to their pupils. Alice sees the pupils in her class as questioning of her authority. They try to "trick" her, won't "let" her finish and present a constant "fight".

> I sort of laugh off their comments and groans...I think they think I enjoy doing it (putting notes on overhead).

She even adopts a strategy of "putting everything" in the notes "and then that way the kids can't ask me anything." About one student she says:

> And you know, like he's always adding his two cents in. It's funny, but it's also -- I don't know if he gets the point or he's just doing it to annoy me.

Tim, on the other hand, apparently enjoys a positive relationship with his pupils. He attempts to plan lessons "intended for specific kids -- to provide a chance (for the pupils) to succeed". When a new girl "snapped" at him, he attempted "to lighten it up a little bit". He consciously planned to "touch upon everyone". He tried to be sensitive to the feelings of individual students. At one point, he

"skipped Michelle because I couldn't remember her name -- this is terrible". Tim reflects upon his strategy of calling on two students "because they were antsy, and so I thought I'd get them included" when he says:

> I realize that's unfair to some of the kids, too, because it seems like the misbehaving people get most of the attention.

Tim appears to be concerned for students, not threatened by them.

Tim is aware of his participation of a social system which reaches beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom. As previously illustrated, he considers his relationship with the parents of his pupils. During his lesson, he "clues" students toward what he perceives to be legitimate discussion or conduct in class.

> Some of their ideas I wasn't too comfortable with -- money for instance...I almost decided not to use this particular analogy...these kids are at the age where they're gonna go home and say, 'You're the authority and your values are wrong' or something like that. So I'm trying to protect myself right here.

His concern gives us an insight into how he is wrestling with the way in which the parents may perceive him. He is looking outside the classroom to the "real world" embodied in the school community.

At other points in the interview, Tim says:

> It's hard -- maybe it's just learning about what it's really like out there -- but I know, for instance, most of the tenth graders, I don't think they would do their homework; or, do any reading if there wasn't something

> that they knew they were going to be evaluated on...It's like there has to be some kind of motivation for them to do the reading...
>
> It seems like everybody's teaching for this Regents (statewide) exam, and I'm going to be put under pressure to do the same, but I don't really want to.
>
> But I'm entering a whole system...and I don't want to teach in a vacuum, so I'm going to have to compromise somewhere along the line. I'm just not sure at what point I'll compromise yet.

These comments reflect a broader view of Tim's perception of the social system. He sees himself in relation to the pupils and the realities of their lives, teachers within a statewide context, and the educators with whom he will work in the future.

Alice sees the cooperating teacher and the pupils as having stronger roles than she in the social system of Mrs. Marotta's classroom. She, however, is "lost", "uncertain" and in a situation where she "can't win". It appears that it is with envy that she describes how "Joan of Arc stood up in front and led..." Is that what she wishes she could do?

In describing, during the interview, the surrender of power to the King by the French people, Alice reveals, "In this particular case, the people get desperate and they start giving away power." Is this how she feels about herself with the social system of the classroom?

In discussing her explanation to the class about sainthood, Alice further reveals her thinking. When a pupil asks how

you get to be a saint, Alice explains what her grandmother had told her about sainthood. The explanation was not accepted by the cooperating teacher nor by some of the pupils, leading Alice to comment in the interview:

> My grandmother said that only the people...(who) contacted earth (after they died could become saints). And that's the only thing I've ever been told. And, I never questioned that.

Alice does not seem to think that it is legitimate to question authority -- indeed she never really questions Mrs. Marotta's criticism of her -- the role of the teacher seems to be to give knowledge to pupils. Does Alice wish that her pupils would be as accepting and unquestioning of her? Does she long for the security of a more comfortable social system which her grandmother might represent?

Alice and Tim are two distinctly different individuals and student teachers. Each reacted to others. In this we could see the social system in some aspects of its complex workings. No proof of direct, causal links between their perceptions of their relationship with others and the ways in which they conceptualized the subject matter content (Gudmudsdottir, Carey, and Wilson, 1985) (McGraw, 1987) (Wineburg, 1987) were seen. I wonder, however, how this conceptualization might somehow be influenced not only by their prior content knowledge but also by the meaning which they attach to it within the social system of the classroom.

Discussion

Further research needs to be done on the possible links among perceptions, meaning and behavior. Erickson (1986) raised such questions when he pointed out:

> Humans, the interpretive perspective asserts, create meaningful interpretations of the physical and behavioral objects that surround them in the environment. We take action toward the objects that surround us in light of our interpretations of meaningfulness. Those interpretations, once made, we take as real -- actual qualities of the objects we perceive.

If it were true -- that student teachers act, at least in part, based on the meaning they assign to their perceptions of other's opinions of them -- then what might this mean for teacher education? Perhaps it would suggest that we need to carefully consider who our cooperating teachers are and how they are matched with our student teachers.

Looking at the two individuals involved in this study, we might well ask whether different cooperating teachers would have made a difference in their experience. Might a more supportive cooperating teacher have helped Alice to begin to find herself as a young teacher? Might her view of self have been more positive? If it had been, would it have changed Alice's behavior? Might a different cooperating teacher have been able to "stretch" Alice's narrow, immediate view of the situation toward a broader, long-range view? Would this be desirable?

Certainly it is the case that the classroom in which any student teacher is placed provides a social system that has already been shaped in large degree by the cooperating teacher and the pupils. Perhaps it is also the case that student teachers who are social studies majors are particularly aware of the classroom as a social system. Clearly, the social system of the classroom was an important factor in the thinking of these two student teachers, and their perceptions of their relationship to the cooperating teacher were closely tied to their perceptions of their relationships with their students.

One student teacher viewed herself as less competent than the cooperating teacher and also seemed to view herself as less able than some of her pupils. The other student teacher viewed himself as worthwhile and valued compared with his cooperating teacher. He also seemed to value the students, their abilities and their needs. One, like a "little girl lost", was still searching to find a place for herself in the social system of the classroom in which she found herself. The other, already secure within the social system of his classroom, was looking ahead, to consider what "work in the real world" would be like.

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